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EXAMPLES OF ICONOCLASM BY THE CONQUERORS OF MEXICO.

BY W. H. HOLMES.

THE two great centers of aboriginal American culture, Mexico and Peru, were the first to feel the shock of the conquest, and the native peoples, together with their arts and institutions, sank at once into irretrievable ruin. Temples, sculptures and paintings, the tangible representatives of an idolatrous worship, excited the hatred of a fanatical priesthood, and were, as nearly as possible, swept from the face of the land. The fiercely intolerant spirit of the representatives of the church is well illustrated by the language of a letter written by Zumarraga, the chief inquisitor of Mexico, to the Franciscan chapter at Tolosa, in January, 1531. The words are as follows: "Very reverend Father be it known to you that we are very busy in the work of converting the heathen; of whom, by the grace of God, upwards of one million have been baptized at the hands of the brethren of the order of our Seraphic Father, Saint Francis; five hundred temples have been leveled to the ground, and more than twenty thousand figures of the devils they worshiped have been broken to pieces and burned."¹

There was, however, a limit to the power of destruction. Many of the greater monuments have defied the destroyer and stand to-day and will stand for ages to come as illustrations of the power and culture of their builders. There were probably few works more difficult to destroy or wholly deface than those found

¹ Quoted by Bancroft, *Native Races*, Vol. II, p. 171.

upon the summit of the justly famed hill of Texcocingo, a favorite resort of the most enlightened rulers of Texcoco.

This *cerro* is upwards of 600 feet in height, and is a narrow ridge, nearly a mile in length, that projects into the valley of Mexico from the range forming its eastern rim. From Texcoco it assumes a somewhat conical shape as indicated in the accompanying sketch, Fig. 1. The upper part is very steep, exhibiting cliffs and huge detached masses of a coarse pinkish-gray moderately hard rock, usually called porphyry, that proves, upon examination under the microscope, to be a variety of andesite. This hill has been the witness of many important and thrilling events in pre-Spanish as well as in Spanish times. It gives unmistakable evidence of having been at one time literally covered

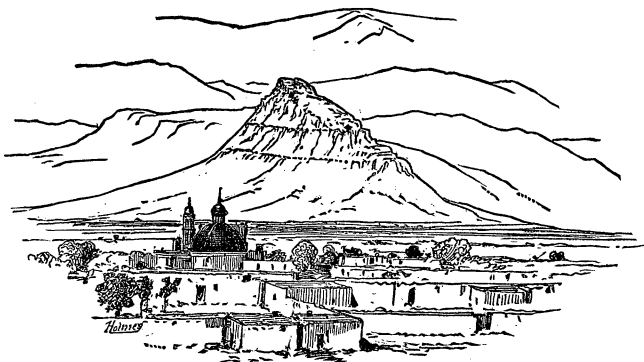


FIG. 1.—Hill of Texcocingo from Texcoco.

with artificial structures, and numerous recesses, niches, stairways and cisterns have been hewn in the living rock. It was a sad day to the despairing Texcocan when he saw his deities tossed over the cliffs, his shrines desecrated, and at the same time beheld afar off, across the plain, the smoke rising from the burning of his sacred records.

At the present time this wonderful hill is almost denuded of its artificial features. There remain but traces of walls and floors, the deep recesses cut in the solid rock and the great battered boulders that were once the images of gods, to tell imperfectly the story of a blasted culture.

Among the most interesting of these remnants is a recess a short distance below the summit on the side facing Texcoco, and indicated by the middle cross in the accompanying sketch. It still retains evidences of its original character and functions. In

the first place it must be described in detail. In beginning an edifice or apartment on the face of the hill, it was necessary first to prepare a floor by cutting a niche into the rock and filling out the level with masonry and cement¹ until a proper platform was secured. The back wall was formed entirely of the living rock and afforded the opportunity of carving out the deity who was to preside over the place. The side walls are partially of the rock in place, and were completed by the addition of heavy masonry, portions of which are still to be seen.

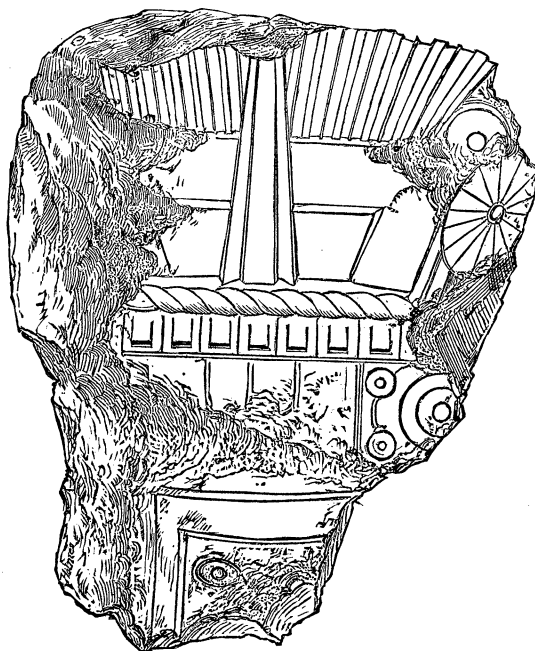


FIG. 2.—Sketch of fragment of idol.

On the floor of this recess I came upon a large fragment of rock that exhibited evidence of having been elaborately sculptured, and which at first suggested the figures peculiar to the calendar stones of the museum at Mexico. The fragment is nearly four feet long, by about three wide and half that thick. The sculpture is confined to one face, the sides and back showing rather fresh irregular fracture.

In making a sketch of the block I observed first that the figures were not symmetrically arranged and not truly radiate, and

¹ A common lime-sand cement, as determined by Professor F. W. Clark.

that a number of the features resembled the ornaments and trappings characteristic of the head-dresses commonly seen in Aztec sculpture. This led to the search for other features, and finally to the discovery of a partially obliterated eye toward the smaller end of the fragment. This convinced me that the object was part of the head of a huge idol. My sketch is reproduced in Fig. 2, but gives a very imperfect idea of the work, which in precision of execution and delicacy of finish equals anything of its class yet brought to my notice. It is a remarkable fact that the surface of the carving has been finished with a coat of red paint or enamel, which to this day exhibits a high polish, and is so

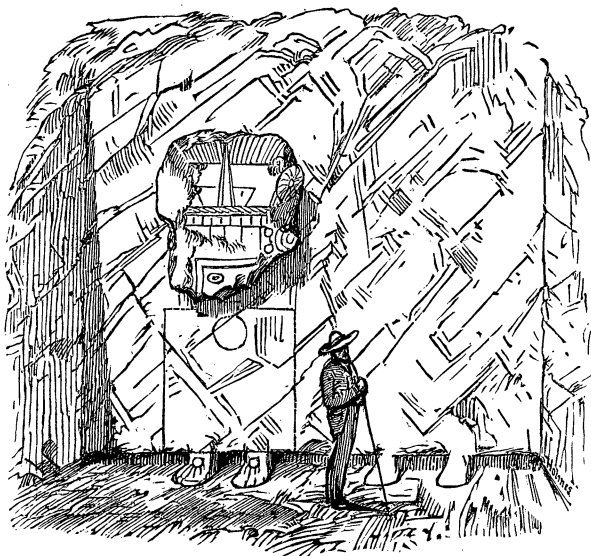


FIG. 3.—Probable position of the idol at the back of the niche.

firmly attached to the rock surface as to be removed with the greatest difficulty. The other portions of the figure have been broken up and carried away, or have been rolled down the side of the *cerro*. At first I was at a loss to imagine the original character and position of the figure to which the head belonged, but after a careful study of the recess I came to the conclusion that it had originally occupied the back wall of the recess, and that it had been carved from the rock in place. The proof of this was entirely satisfactory.

I observed first that the central part of the rear wall was not smoothly dressed, and that the rock surface showed compara-

tively recent fracture. In examining it closely I found at the base, as shown in the sketch, Fig. 3, an undercut channel, in and in front of which, after clearing away the earth, I detected a pair of feet carved in the rock. They were badly mutilated but still showed traces of the toes and portions of the sandals. These feet had originally formed part of a complete figure, and the fragment of head found on the floor had belonged to it.

Another pair of feet at the right, still more completely obliterated, indicated the position of a second figure. The fragment shown in Fig. 2 lies on the floor at *a*, Fig. 3, and doubtless originally occupied nearly the position in the wall indicated in the sketch. These figures had been wedged or blown off and broken up by the Spaniards, and the whole shrine dismantled. There are other recesses of similar character in this hill, which show like treatment by the conquerors or their descendants. One at the opposite end of the crest, near the terminus of the great causeway, is said to have had a calendar carved in the living rock of the rear wall, a spot now exhibiting a deep irregular excavation thought to have been made by treasure hunters.¹

In this connection it is convenient to mention a remarkable piece of work, a block of curiously carved andesite that rests upon the outer extremity of the crest of the hill. Although in such a prominent place it is partially obscured by trees of copal, etc., and would escape the attention of the casual observer; besides, the sledge of the destroyer has obliterated much of the evidence of art. In order to preserve a memorandum of the work, I stood upon a contiguous rock and made the sketch presented in Fig. 4, my line of vision being at an angle of 45° with the flat surface of the stone, *c c*, which is horizontally placed.

The surface has been cut down, leveled and finished with a pointed implement, leaving a pecked or granular surface, while the middle portion of the rock was left in relief and carved into the curious form indicated in the sketch, but which has been almost completely obliterated by the hammer of the despoiler.

The query arises, what has this rock been, and what its function, that the godly missionaries should have endeavored to destroy it?

¹ For details see Bancroft's *Native Races* and works cited by him.

I was struck at first sight, although without previous thought of the matter, that here was a stone perfectly suited for the offering of human sacrifice. I could readily imagine the feet of the victim placed upon the step *b*, while his back rested upon the highest level, *a*, giving the ideal position assumed in the pictures in the blood-curdling narratives of the conquerors. The level spaces, *c c*, would afford a perfectly convenient support for the feet of the officiating priests.

By inverting the picture it will be seen that the part of the figure most effectually destroyed by the hammer of the iconoclast has an outline suggestive of the upper part of a human figure, so

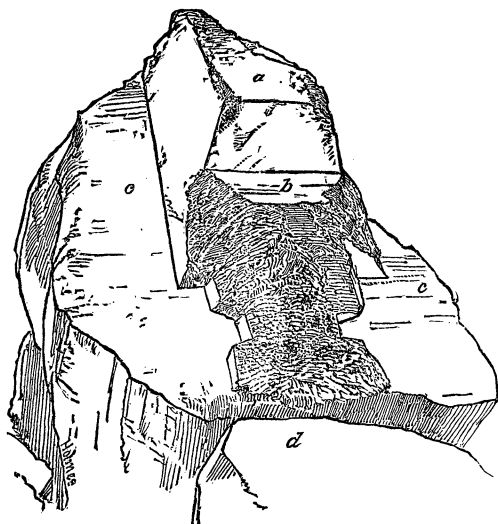


FIG. 4.—Sculptured rock on the summit of the hill of Texcocingo.

that it is not impossible that this stone was really the figure of some deity, partly finished, perhaps, as the step-like portion representing the knees of the supposed figure is entirely without suggestions of the limbs.

The prostrate position rather tends to discredit this theory, as such figures are usually carved in place, the mass being too great to be easily adjusted to an upright position. The length of this figure and of the block is about eleven feet. A contiguous block of stone, *d*, although apparently never a part of it, is also cut down to the same level as *c c*, indicating the intention to make use of the surface in its present position. It is perfectly natural that one should feel a desire to identify one of the sacri-

ficial stones of the Aztecs. I present this instance as at least a plausible case.

The Texcocan monarch is said to have climbed the 500 steps that led to the summit to worship an idol that stood there, and it is said that this idol, hewn from the living rock, was the image of a coyote, the emblem of Nezahualcoyotl, the King.

Since, however, human sacrifice is acknowledged to have been extensively practiced by these people, it strikes me that in no other locality could we more readily expect to find the material evidence of the existence of such a practice as on the summit of this wonderful hill, a point which overlooked the whole valley of Mexico, and which seems to have been almost wholly devoted to the service of the gods.

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THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.

BY E. D. COPE.

TIME has fully justified the enterprise of Dr. Hayden in urging upon Congress the project of the creation of the Yellowstone National Park; and the protection of this and other especially interesting parts of our country by the arm of the National Government has met with almost unanimous approval.

The function of the Yellowstone Park may be looked on as three-fold: first, as a place of permanent preservation of the geysers and hot springs and their deposits; second, as a place of protection of the game of the country; and third, as a place of recreation for tourists. The first of these uses has always been uppermost. The second has been more and more engaging the attention of Congress, and the *NATURALIST* published an editorial in its issue of July, 1884, pressing on public attention the necessity of making it a more complete preserve for game than it had previously been. This article was reprinted; and later, our contemporary, *Science*, took up the subject editorially. As a probable consequence of this agitation a bill was introduced into Congress, last winter, providing for a more complete supervision of the territory of the park. Ten men with a gamekeeper and the superintendent, constitute the present force. As this was manifestly insufficient to police a territory of such great extent, the new bill contemplated the addition of fifteen men to the num-